

## **Dance Department History Project 2010-2011**

### **Transcribed interview of Pam Musil in November 17, 2010 Interviewed by Susanne Johnson Davis**

I'm Pam Musil and I came onto the full-time faculty in the then Modern Dance Division in 1993. I would like to start my history with my earliest memories because I think it connects to what happened later. As a high school student, I was looking at universities to attend but BYU was not on my list. I did not want to be a BYU zoobie. I felt like that was something I wasn't interested in doing. But we had a career day, and like the good student I was, I was supposed to choose three college presentations to attend. I already knew I was going to go to Utah State, and I was not impressed with the presentation. I was thinking; I wasn't feeling anything.

The next one I went to was Snow College. I wasn't interested in this college, but my friend was, so I went to support her. I sat through that presentation and thought it wasn't for me. I had one more choice and so I didn't know where to go, so I went to BYU's presentation. That very day, I knew I would be coming to BYU and that's where I needed to go. It was as clear as day for me. Fortunately, it wasn't so hard to get in, so I was able to get in. I was a good student, but not the sort of caliber we get here now.

I came in as an undergrad in 1974, and was here from 1974 to 1978 as a dance education student with a health minor. During that time, I performed with the Cougarettes from 1976 to 1977. I also performed with the Dancer's Company from 1977 to 1978. There was actually a half-year overlap between those two companies. In fall of 1977, I was performing with the Cougarettes and the Dancer's Company, so that was really a busy year.

My adviser in Cougarettes was Claudia Hyatt, and Pat Debenham was the director of the Dancers' Company. That year, we went to Northern California and Pat and Dee and Abby all came with us. Doris Treheo also came with us as a graduate student. It was quite a historic tour, I think, because there were so many faculty. I remember that van and going to the small colleges there. I remember San Jose College and staying with a white woman I overheard them saying was a Bohemian. I was pretty naive and didn't know what that meant, and exclaimed that my husband's heritage is from Bohemia. They laughed at me and I had no idea what they were laughing at. That was a great tour and opportunity to do that. In fact, I think it was one of the first tours that the Dancers' Company took, if not *the* first because it was a fairly new company at the time.

I studied with Dee Winterton, and like I said, he was on that memorable trip with us. I studied with Sara Lee. I would consider her my greatest mentor. I have worked with her for many years. Cathy Black and Abby Wyatt were also my teachers. I took a social dance class from Alma Heaton, Chris Alerton, and Phyllis Jacobsen. I remember in those days how close knit we were. It was a smaller, simpler time, I think. It just felt like everyone knew everyone and we had the same classes together. I felt nurtured here in the RB. I felt like I had a home and a family here, which was as important as my development as a professional.

I remember coming to graduation and I had actually done the program in four years, instead of five years as it is now, earning my degree in dance education and certification by going to school in the spring and summer for two or three years. I never got tired of it. I loved every minute of it. I felt like I wasn't ready to graduate, but I did, and went away for a few years to start my family. I came back as a graduate student. Phyllis had created this grad program by getting together with PE so we could build our degree program. I was very fortunate to come that year as a graduate teaching assistant. I was assigned classes to teach and I taught the beginning and intermediate modern dance classes. Back then we had intermediate class that wasn't a technique class. Phyllis was still chair and I remember feeling nurtured and embraced and like I really had a home.

I had the opportunity during that time to teach those modern dance classes and jazz classes and be the assistant to teaching the Cougarettes. At that time, it was Cheryl Dalling. Cheryl had replaced Claudia and I was able to work with her a little. As I was working on my thesis, Les Ditson came on to the faculty. He wasn't here when I came on in 1980, but after I left in 1982, I wasn't finished with my thesis. Les became my thesis adviser.

When I left in 1982, I taught at Mountain View High School where I taught from 1982 to '83. During that time, I finished my thesis, with Les as my committee chair. Sara Lee Gibb was on my committee, and I had Rulon Francis on my committee as well. During that time I was teaching in the program, I had daughters that were enrolled in dancing. I taught in that program under Chris Alerton. I performed also during that time. There was a time that the modern dance faculty had collaborated to do modern dance choreography for the Women's Conference which was called Rejoice to the World, which I had the opportunity to participate in and used music from Handel's Messiah. They also did a collaboration on the parable of the Ten Virgins. We had a painting in the

dance office for a long time by Gayla Larsen. Cathy Debenham, Cathy Black, Chris Alerton had collaborated on and created that. I originated the role of richness and vanity. I danced as that virgin and performed in that piece.

In 1993, I received a call from Phyllis out of the blue, at the time I was still working at Mountain View. It was in January, I remember. She told me that Les Ditson was going to take a one-year sabbatical and asked me if I would be interested in taking that job for a year. I was a little worried because I was leaving my job, but I took a one year unpaid sabbatical. That eased my mind, but I heard there was a good chance that Les would not be returning—using that year to take some time off and see if that was what he wanted to do.

I came in as a temporary faculty member with a one-year contract. My assignment that year was overwhelming because I had to teach his dance kinesiology class. It wasn't new to me since my thesis was on dance science, but I hadn't been teaching that material for ten years. That was a big year. I was also assigned a graduate class that year. He had been teaching a graduate technique class. I was also a graduate coordinator that year. I came in with a heavy load and heavy administrator as a one-year teacher. At the end of that year, we went through the search process and I was selected for the full-time faculty position on a tenure track.

I've been here since then and now midway through my seventeenth year here. During that time, I have taught kinesiology consistently. There has only been one time I did not teach it during a spring term and Raymond Robinson assisted and taught part of the class. Cathy Thomas did too, so I guess it was three times I did not teach the class. Otherwise, I've taught it both during winter and often during spring semester as well. It was slated to be taught every other year, but often it was taught every year.

The other hat I wear is in Dance Education. I think when they hired me, they knew Sara Lee, who was the division administrator over the modern dance division, was moving towards administration and that Phyllis was getting close to retirement. In a way, they were grooming me to take over the dance education program. I did work with Sara Lee for two or three years. We partnered with that material and then I became the sole steward of it for a while. Becky Phillips took a few classes, and Marilyn Berrett stepped in occasionally.

For twelve years, I took most of the responsibility for the dance education program. In 2008, we brought Kory Wakamatsu on as a dance education faculty. She is now here in her third year as a temporary faculty member. We are hoping that will be permanent in the near future. She has taken a lot of that load. Up until 2008, it mostly fell on my shoulders. I supervise student teaching and student teachers. I've supervised countless student teachers throughout the year, maybe a hundred. I've taught the practicum, the teaching method class, I've taught the 276 class, which is the intro to the public schools. Now, Marilyn and Kory and I share those classes equitably so I don't have so much of the load. I've also taught technique.

In 2008, I became the division administrator just at the end of the year of 2008. When Pat Debenham was going out, and I was about to come in, we made a name change from the Modern Dance to the Contemporary Dance Division. I came in as the new contemporary administrator in 2008. At that time, I also became the dance ensemble director. That was the first time I had the opportunity to direct a dance company. Previously, I adored what I was doing with dance education, but I realized when I became the director that I had really been missing that aspect of being in the studio and creating with students with their choreography.

I had done that heavily for ten years in the high school. I had been away for a long time, but I enjoyed it immensely. Because I wasn't working with choreography as intensely during the first years of my assignment here, I honed in on my writing skills and in publication that I think at first was a little all over the place. I wasn't sure where to focus my attention. But as I became more advanced, I became more interested in adolescent and growth and development, but also social and gender issues. Issues adolescents face when they go through that time of their lives. My research has honed in on that. I have tried to connect my research and writing to my teaching as well. They are intertwined in a lot of ways. Through those years, I have done choreography and it has not been the focus of what I've done up until I became the Dance Ensemble director. I've realized women's issues have colored and influenced the decisions and themes that I choose for my choreography. The choreography has been very focused in an autobiographical way. The experiences I choose come through. It has been very fulfilling to do creative work that reflects what I'm feeling and in my stage of life.

I just had such rich opportunities to work with amazing people not only in the dance department but in the college as well—The College of Health and Human Performance. I had classes from most of the health faculty in my health minor.

Other things that have taken place more recently: we lost our graduate program. That was not a happy time. We felt we were deceived. I had just been released as director and Pat came back. Dean Conlee had several conversations for a long time about changing our program from a MA to a MFA – which would have more

students coming in and students would be better qualified. I had so many proposals writing about that.

Dean Conlee had several conversations about putting the MA program on furlough and then bringing it back out as an MFA program. We listened to our dean and we began winding it down. We decided to put it on furlough. That began its demise. I don't think we knew what it meant to furlough the program. We worked on it for two years and Cathy Black worked on that as well. As it came about, when we presented it as a proposal, we no longer had a graduate program and it didn't exist anymore. That strand of our past has been lost for now. I don't know what the future will hold.

Our program has changed too. Students can emphasize in ballroom dance or ballet or modern dance. We did not have the world dance emphasis. But we changed that to a more general emphasis so students can have the technique classes they take. I feel that is a forward step especially now as I see the direction programs are taking in their post-secondary programs. That particularly is true in world dance, as they are valuing globalization. I think there is great valuing of world dance and a lot of conversation in how to incorporate it in college curriculum.

We also moved our dance education program from a secondary emphasis to K-12. Our students will not only be certified in secondary education but also endorsed in K-6 programs. We are just starting that this year. Students just accepted as dance majors will now be K-12 dance education majors. That is a change I have seen.

Another major thing is that we have grown. Sometimes, I worry we lost the family nurturing environment. I think our students feel very nurtured, but to me, it feels a lot bigger than it used to. It's harder to have close-knit relationships.